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Is The Internet Use An Effective Method To Cope With Elderly Loneliness And Decrease Loneliness Symptom?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study whether the use of internet could be an effective method for elderly people to cope with the loneliness. In the screening study based on the relationship model, a total of 569 elderly individuals were included. The obtained results showed that higher levels of loneliness in elderly people living alone, more than the elderly using the internet, such as more use of social networks, higher education level concluded that the increase in internet usage and decreased loneliness. In general it could be stated that use of internet has an important place among methods used in dealing with loneliness of mature and adult individuals.

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Keywords: Elderly, loneliness, coping, use of the internet.

1. Introduction

The factors affecting life quality of old age are generally seen to be related with health. Being healthy may be defined as the complete well-being of individuals physically, mentally and emotionally (Danna & Griffin, 1999). The fact that old individuals perceive life quality positively or negatively depends partially on their subjective interpretations and partially on the real events they experience (Xavier, Ferraz, Marc, Escosteguy, & Moriguchi,

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2003). One of the most important structures which affect the life quality of old people is loneliness. Loneliness is the situation in which the individual feels not understood and lonely (Geçtan, 1999); an unpleasant mood experienced as a result of the difference between the current social relations and desired social relations (Pepleu and Perlman, 1981); a situation in which there are the social relations needed by the individual or different social relations, however which relations do not include intimacy, sincerity and emotiveness (Weiss, 1973). According to Young (1982), loneliness is the lack of satisfying social relations or psychological stress accompanying this lack. Loneliness is affected by subjective lives of old individuals related with incomplete, secret and social needs (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).

There are two types of loneliness experienced by the old people: social and emotional loneliness (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997). Especially old people experience emotional loneliness more intensively (Solomon & Greenberg, 2000) and emotional loneliness is a strong predictor which affects life quality when compared with social loneliness (Salimi, 2011). Social loneliness is mostly related with aging, health problems, living in the country, low communication with friends, reducing of incomes and restriction in movements while emotional loneliness is mostly related with familial status, getting divorced or never marrying, restricted visits of children and living alone (Drennan et al, 2008).

There are many factors which affect the appearance of loneliness in old people. In the studies, low social communication, factors which result from physical and demographical conditions and which affect the individual psychologically (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2007), living alone, having low social communication, experiencing intensive sadness, not being visited by especially friends and siblings (Adams et al, 2004; Dugan & Kivett, 1994), loss of spouse (Yell & Lo, 2004), being divorced (De Jong-Gierveld, 1987), aging, low education level (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001; Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999; Hazer & Boylu, 2010), being physically disabled, using drugs permanently and not having any hobbies (Arslantaş & Ergin, 2011), being deprived of social support (Drageset, Kirkevold & Espehaug, 2011), physical inactivity, various illnesses, loss of a relative, physical and mental weaknesses and reducing of incomes (Fokkema & Knipscheer, 2007), living away from sons and daughters and neighbors (Chalise, Saito, Takahashi & Kai, 2007), low self-respect, not being content with the living space and being completely dependent on others in daily activities (Hacıhasanoglu, Yıldırım & Karakurt, 2012) increase loneliness in old people.

Loneliness feeling in old people brings about some psychological problems. These are high level of anxiety (Fees, Martin & Poon, 1999), low self-esteem (Van Baarsen (2002), low self-respect (McWhirter, 1990), low self-sufficiency (Fry & Debats, 2002), tiredness, lack of purpose, depression, insignificance thoughts (Luo, Hawkey, Waite, & Cacioppo, 2012), self-pity and social dissonance (Joiner, Thomas, Peter, Seeley & John, 2002; Baker & Bugay, 2011), sleep and anxiety disorder (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006), hopelessness, thought and attempt of suicide (Schinka, Dulmen, Bossarte & Swahn, 2012; Chang, Sanna, Hirsch & Jeglic, 2010), thought of death, withdrawing from social interaction (Ayalon & Shiovitz, 2011), social harmony difficulty (Duru, 2008).

Many methods can be used in old people to deal with feeling of loneliness. One of these methods is using computer and internet. Using computer and internet is an efficient way to increase potential of friendship and social interaction and decreasing negative feelings related with loneliness. Obtaining reliable information from internet via e-mail or other channels, participating in various friendship groups contribute to making the lives of old people more efficient (Kiel, 2005). When the researches are analyzed, it is seen that the individuals who access social network facebook page most are the ones who are the loneliest (Ryan & Xenos, 2011), old individuals experiencing loneliness problem use internet and e-mail more than the ones who do not, they get more emotional support via this method, their loneliness decreases and their life satisfaction increases through their online friendships (Martin & Schumacher, 2003), there is a negative relation between internet use and loneliness, as level of internet use increases, loneliness level decreases (Bond, Burr, Wolf, & Feldt, 2010; Carpenter & Buday, 2007) in a study on internet use, life quality and loneliness, the loneliness level of the ones who use internet decreases when compared to the ones do not and their life qualities decreases (Blazun, Saranto & Rissanen, 2012).

In a research by Turkey Geriatrics and Technologies Foundation (TUYEV), it was found that 14% of the old people in Turkey use computer and internet, 49% of them use internet for e-mail, 44% for research, 37% to follow the news (www.tuyev.org/haber/index.05.01.2011); it was concluded that 87,9% of college graduates and 87,2% of faculty or higher education graduates use internet (TÜİK, Turkish Households Science Technologies Use Survey, 2008). Although these rates are low, using internet as a method to deal with loneliness may be proper.

1.1. Purpose

General purpose of this paper is to determine whether internet use is efficient or not in dealing with old-age loneliness problem. To this end, answers were sought for the following questions.

Sub-Cases

Following sub-cases will be used in order to achieve the general purpose defined above.

- 1.1 Does loneliness level differ according to using or not using computer in old people?
- 1.2 Do computer use and loneliness level differ according to education level in old people?
- 1.3 Do computer use and loneliness level differ according to age?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

563 people in total, 369 of who applied to different services in Sakarya State Hospital between 10.01.2012 and 25.03.2012 and 194 of who stay in Nursing Home in provinces of Kayseri and Sakarya were taken as sample in the study which is based on relational scanning model.

Table 1. Data on the sample of the research

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Internet User	185	88	273
Non-User	165	125	290
			563

2.2 Used Scale

The UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form (ULS-8): It was developed by Russell, Peplau and Ferguson and was re-ordered in 1980 (Russell, Peplau & Cutrano, 1980). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), criterion-related validity and internal consistency were tested. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) yielded one factor accounting for 36.69% of the total variance. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in order to verify the previously identified one factor structure of the scale obtained by the initial EFA in a sample of Turkish university students. CFA revealed that the one factor structure of the scale had a reasonably satisfactory goodness of fit. The relationship between perceived social support, social emotional loneliness and depression were examined for criterion-related validity of the scale. The ULS-8 had a positive correlation with social-emotional loneliness and depression and a significantly negative correlation with perceived social support. The correlation between ULS-8 and the UCLA Loneliness Scale was .88 ($p < .001$). The internal consistency of the scale was good with a Cronbach's Alpha of .72. It is a scale made of 8 items of which 6 are direct and the other 2 are reverse coded. In each item of the scale, a circumstance that states a sense or a thought about the social relation is presented and the individuals are asked to state how often they meet this circumstance, on a four point Likert scale. Higher score are accepted as a sign of loneliness that is met very occasionally. In Turkey, the validity and reliability study of the UCLA Loneliness Scale was completed by Doğan, Çötök ve Tekin (2011).

2.3 Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis with the purpose of to determine the relation between the variables were applied to the data obtained in the research and t test was made in paired comparisons. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS 10 program.

3. Findings

Hypothesis 1 - Does loneliness level differ according to using or not using computer in old people?

Table 2. Mean scores, standard deviation, t test and significance level of loneliness levels according to using or not using computer in old people

	Internet	N	Mean	St.dv.	t	P
Loneliness	Use	273	17,11	2,21	-9,36	.001
	Don't Use	290	20,39	4,41		

In Table 2, data on mean score, standard deviation, t test and significance level of loneliness levels of individuals who use and do not use internet in old people are given. As a result of the significance test (t-test) of the difference between two mean scores, the difference was found significant. Accordingly, the loneliness levels of old people who do not use internet are higher than those who do.

Hypothesis 2-Do computer use and loneliness level differ according to education level in old people?

Table 3. Mean scores, standard deviation, t test and significance levels of loneliness levels according to education level and internet use in old people

Education Level	Internet	N	X	St.dv.	t	P
Primary	Use	96	19,20	2,20	-3,12	.001
	Loneliness Don't Use	169	23,18	4,54		
Secondary	Use	103	16,45	2,37	6.56	.000
	Loneliness Don't Use	83	20,18	4,23		
High School or Higher	Use	74	13,24	2,20	-4.47	.001
	Loneliness Don't Use	38	16,54	3,91		

In Table 3, data on internet use and loneliness levels according to education level are given. When the results are examined, it is concluded that as the education level increases, internet use also does and loneliness level decreases; the loneliness levels of those who do use internet are significantly lower than those who don't according to education levels.

Hypothesis 3-Do computer use and loneliness level differ according to age?

Table 4. Mean scores, standard deviation, t test and significance levels of loneliness levels according to age level and internet use in old people

Age	Internet	N	X	St.dv.	t	P
	Use	201	16.79	1.91		.001

55-60	Loneliness	Don't Use	89	19.20	4.20	5.25	
		Use	111	17.22	2.23	3.49	
61-65	Loneliness	Don't Use	75	20.24	5.06		.001
		Use	28	19.84	3.26		
66+	Loneliness	Don't Use	59	21.93	3.73	1.76	.085
		Use					

In Table 4, data on internet use and loneliness levels according to age level are given. In the table, it is concluded that loneliness generally increases with age, internet use is the highest between ages of 55 and 65, the loneliness levels of the internet users of the individuals of 55-60 and 61-65 are significantly lower than those who don't according to the result of t test analysis and the difference between the individuals who use and do not use internet is not significant at the age of 66 and over.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

According to the findings obtained in the research, it was concluded that old people using internet have lower loneliness levels than those who don't; as the education level increases, internet use also does and loneliness level decreases; loneliness level increases with age and the group who uses internet most is the age range of 55-65.

According to the result of the research, old people using internet generally have lower loneliness levels than those who don't. This result proves that internet use is an efficient method to deal with loneliness in old people. In the related researches it was found that there is a negative relation between internet use and loneliness, as internet use increases, loneliness level decreases (Bond, Burr, Wolf, & Feldt, 2010; Carpenter & Buday, 2007); obtaining reliable information from internet via e-mail or other channels and participating in various friendship groups contribute to making the lives of old people more efficient (Kiel, 2005), old individuals experiencing loneliness problem use internet and e-mail more than the ones who don't, they get more emotional support via this method, their loneliness decreases and their life satisfaction increases through their online friendships (Martin & Schumacher, 2003), in an experimental study on internet use, life quality and loneliness, the loneliness level of the experiment group who uses internet decreases when compared to the experiment group who does not and their life qualities increase (Blazun, Saranto & Rissanen, 2012). Related literature supports the obtained result.

In the research, it is seen that as the education level increases, internet use also does and loneliness level decreases in old people. Using computer and internet requires a certain level of education. Having a high education level increases the desire to learn and communicate with other people. This situation helps the individual to be more active and deal with loneliness problem. When the researches are examined, it is seen that desire to learn increases computer and internet use and therefore negative emotions related with loneliness decrease as a result of the increase in friendship potential and social interaction (Kiel, 2005), as the education level increases, loneliness decreases (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001; Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999; Hazer & Boylu, 2010).

According to the result of the research, loneliness increases with age and the one who use computer and internet most are the individuals at the age of 55-65. Separating from friends, children or neighbors, economic problems, various illnesses, living depending on other people, physical disabilities and lack of many things increase with the aging. This condition naturally brings about the loneliness problem in the old people. Researches prove that aging is the biggest factor in the occurrence of loneliness (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001; Ernst & Cacioppo, 1999; Hazer & Boylu, 2010).

As a result, when the results and literature information are examined, they prove that internet use is an efficient method to deal with loneliness in old people. Based on these results, providing trainings and necessary opportunities for computer and internet use would be beneficial in increasing the skills of old people to deal with loneliness.

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